

A Whole Brain is better than two halves.

The argument about whether we have a left brain and a right brain is just a distraction from what really matters. We want our students to learn and our teachers to teach using all of their brain! Although more recent brain imaging techniques have shown that the notion of a differentiation of brain functions into left and right halves may be far too simplistic it is still clear that our education system has tended to emphasise a rather narrow range of brain capabilities. So whether or not the research supports the idea of left and right brain learning the Whole Brain Thinking model is a very useful model – a metaphor if you like – for how successful learning and teaching might happen. Given that learning is done by people not too them it would be a useful starting point in understanding another's preferred way of thinking and learning. Teaching and learning are two different things and one does not always lead to the other. Accelerated learning happens when a learners thinking preference and a teachers thinking / teaching preference match. Learning then becomes much easier and faster. As teachers we have all experienced 'easy teaching' and 'hard teaching'. As students we have experienced 'easy learning' and 'hard learning'. This is all to do with understanding thinking preferences.

What is Whole Brain Learning?

Everything we do starts with our brain - the way we react to others, make decisions, communicate, learn, choose careers, manage people, and bring up our families - they all depend on how we think! We all have preferred ways of thinking. Some people focus on facts, others look for relationships. Some like detail, others prefer the bigger picture.

Whilst our personal 'thinking preferences' can sometimes help us in certain situations, they can also inhibit our ability to function fully and effectively. So to improve our effectiveness - both personally and organisationally - we need to more fully understand our thinking preferences.

I never cease to be amazed by the number of teachers who persist to teach with a style that is clearly not working for most of their students and at the same time causing themselves high levels of frustration. This is also true of managers in a school relating to their teams. I am reminded of the saying 'Insanity is doing the same things over and over hoping the results will be different'.

Starting the Journey

To begin any new journey, and learning is a journey, we need a starting point. No point in heading off into the wilderness if you don't know where you are starting from. And so it is with understanding another's thinking preferences. The 'shotgun' approach so prevalent in our schools today is a recipe for frustration and failure. The starting point, then, is to understand how each of the parties in the learning process prefers to think. The way to do this is to undertake a 'brain profile'. This is an on-line, non-invasive, painless process! A brain profile will identify your thinking preference.

There are no right or wrong thinking preferences – but there are consequences. Consequences for levels of success, confidence, ease of learning, and our attitude towards teaching and learning.

Which part of your brain do you like best and why it matters?

Mr Bruce is very precise and exact. He loves his subject. He is always right and comes across as a little arrogant. He is impatient with his students and appears to be somewhat aloof. John really likes him and learns well from him. They have very similar ways. Both can be quite intimidating. Interaction in the class is quite limited and often negative. Tom gets frustrated by Mr Bruce, and John for that matter. He regards John as the teacher’s pet. Tom regularly gets into trouble for talking and has given up asking questions for fear of being made to look stupid. His frustration boils over every now and then. He has grown to really dislike Mr Bruce and his subject. Mr Bruce says Tom needs to try harder.

Lets look at what is going on here. Take a look at he quadrants below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likes working with facts • Deals with facts / issues in a precise way • Looks at problems in a logical and rational way • Likes working with numbers • Interested in technical aspects • Performance is important • Prefers to analyse facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees the whole picture, not detail • Likes change and trying new things • Enjoys being busy with several things at the same time • Looks for alternative answers • Enjoys challenge and risk • Does not always do things the same way
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers traditional thinking • Likes to be organised and orderly • Likes to work with detail • Prefers a stable and reliable work environment • Feels comfortable with procedure • The task at hand is important – will complete it on time • Prefers security and safety to risk taking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts experienced in an emotional way • Sympathetic and intuitive towards people • Likes interaction • Problem solving is often and emotional, not logical, process • Shows enthusiasm when they like an idea • Talks to process learning

As you can see Mr Bruce’s and John’s thinking preferences are in the top left quadrant whereas Tom’s are in the bottom right quadrant. Each is not going out of their way to upset the other – they just think differently and neither understands that. Or if they do neither knows what to do about it.

Why would you bother?

Understanding thinking preferences offer a number of advantages:

- Students gain an insight into their thinking [learning] preferences which makes it easier for them to initiate successful learning strategies.
- The results are useful to teachers who can appreciate and understand student's questions, comments and answers in the light of their preferred style of thinking.
- Understanding thinking preferences is useful when using group work. Both teacher and other students develop an understanding for those who are different.
- Teachers gain an insight into their own thinking preferences

Taking a holiday in another's mind.

Thinking preferences are uncovered by undertaking a Brain Profile. There is no best profile. There are strengths of each profile just as there are challenges for any profile. Understanding your thinking preference gives you some advantage but understanding and being able to identify another's opens up a whole new world of relating differently. Understanding another's gives you the opportunity to take a holiday in their mind and identify their thinking preferences. The old 'golden rule' has changed. It used to be 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. The new 'golden rule' is 'Treat others as they wish to be treated.' Do this and you will find life will become a whole lot more easy. Start by understanding yours and other's thinking preferences and begin the journey towards using your whole brain.

About the author:

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